



CAPTivations

Success Stories in Prevention

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Summit (County Colorado) Prevention Alliance

Students in Summit County, Colorado, are finding out that if they don't drink alcohol, they are not freaks, geeks, or otherwise unusual. They are, in fact, perfectly normal.

For the 2002-2003 school year, the Summit Prevention Alliance has launched a full-throttled "This is Us" campaign, designed to show high school students and eighth graders that most of them—seven out of ten, in fact—do not drink alcohol in a given week.

"We know this approach has made a difference with other high schools and universities," said Jeanie Ringelberg, executive director of Summit Prevention Alliance.

"We've seen the evidence and we want to make this work."

This approach is social norms theory, which, according to Northern Illinois University researcher Michael Haines, "holds that if students perceive something to be the norm, they tend to alter their behaviors to fit the norm, even if it isn't reality." Haines wrote a paper on the effectiveness of social norms theory at NIU, where a campus-wide media campaign successfully lowered students' perceptions of their peers' drinking norms. NIU students reported less binge drinking each year over a six-year period, with an overall decrease of 35 percent. They also reported 31 percent fewer alcohol-related injuries to self and 54 percent fewer alcohol-related injuries to others.

The impetus for "This is Us" began in early 2000, with a state incentive grant from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and the Colorado Kids Ignore Drugs. A coalition was formed, comprised of law enforcement, principals, school counselors, three high school students, parents, and marketing representatives from the local radio stations.

These individuals represent people from a county about 70 miles west of Denver nestled in the Rocky Mountains, in the heart of ski country. The main communities in the county are Breckenridge, Silverthorne, Dillon, and Frisco, and is home to several well known ski resorts.

About 24,000 live in the county, but the numbers swell to 100,000 in peak ski season.

One of the effects of being in a resort area is that the population is very transient, said Susan Robertson, prevention program coordinator of the Summit County Prevention Pilot Project, based at the Summit County Youth and Family Services. The population is young and tends not to be invested in the community. Because it is a resort community, many homes are not occupied year round.

Cost of housing in the county is high, and many adults have to work multiple jobs, often in the service sector, Robertson said. Summit County ranks among the top in the nation in the percentage of women in the workforce.

The county also has a lot of workers from other areas of the world, including South America, Mexico, and Eastern Europe, Ringelberg said. This translates into a number of kids in the schools for whom English is their second language.

The coalition which formed in 2000, Ringelberg said, identified four gaps in

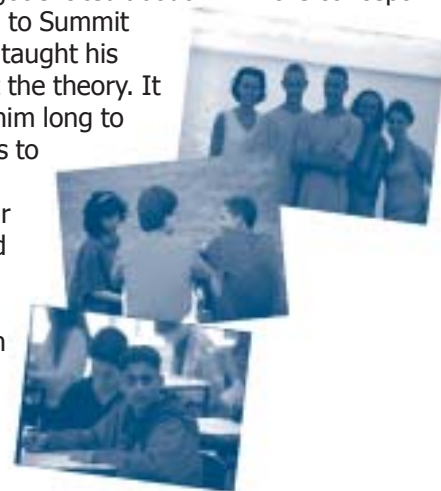
the county's prevention delivery program:

1. The need for a community-wide approach to prevention;
2. The lack of a K-12 curriculum;
3. Involvement of the parents; and
4. Comprehensive support of those students who have been identified as being at risk.

The coalition was looking at these areas when a man from Robertson's department, Jake Quigley, went to a conference on social norms theory and got excited about the concept. He returned to Summit County and taught his peers about the theory. It didn't take him long to win converts to his cause.

"Our struggle had been to get the schools interested in making an effort on prevention programs,"

"... if students perceive something to be the norm, they tend to alter their behaviors to fit the norm, even if it isn't reality."



Robertson said. "This time, the school bought in to the idea from square one."

The coalition sent two representatives from Summit High School, along with three students, to another social norms conference in the spring of 2001, where they had lunch with Jeff Linkenbach, a preventionist in Montana and a leader in the social norms movement. He works with Montana's statewide social norms program, "Most of Us," and has headed several studies on social norming in alcohol and tobacco use. Linkenbach then came to Summit County that fall to give a presentation on social norms theory.

The coalition began its work in February 2002 with an online survey of 600 Summit High School students about their perceptions of other students' use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and their own actual use. What the coalition found, and what it chose to focus on in its subsequent campaign, was that seven out of ten students don't drink in an average week.

The coalition and prevention alliance began to get its message out in the spring with water bottles, which were handed out to ninth-eleventh grade students and to eighth graders at their graduation. Coalition members polled students to come up with the "This is Us" slogan. Over the summer, students in focus groups chose the pictures used in the "This is Us" campaign. The poster are displayed throughout the school. Because the kids selected the photos, students are dissuaded from claiming the individuals in the ads are dorks. Students continue to play a part in the campaign, meeting every second

Thursday of the month in the high school community room.

Students aren't the only ones being sold on the "This is Us" campaign. Teachers at the start of the year were

encouraged to hang the posters in the classroom, and if they were one of the 10 classes chosen on a specified day and had the

poster on the wall, they got a \$5 gift certificate.

Parents received postcards explaining "This is Us" and giving them tips on how to talk

...two "Blues Brothers"-like characters who saunter around the school asking students questions about the poster.

also tell their kids most Summit High School students are involved in athletics, hold a part time job, and do not use tobacco.

The prevention alliance is using other media in addition to the school posters. The alliance is running commercials on the two local radio stations—targeted for students on the young adult station and the other for parents on the station aimed at an older audience. In October, theater ads began displaying the seven out of ten statistic before each movie in the county. Newspapers also are running the ads.

To ensure the kids are getting the message, the alliance has employed the Money Brothers, two "Blues Brothers"-like characters who saunter around the school asking students questions about the poster. Those who can correctly answer questions about the poster get a dollar.

The alliance is keeping track of the comments it is receiving about the campaign and is planning a new survey of the students in February 2003. However, it is already getting positive response indirectly from the community reaction to one of the ski resort's ad campaigns, which came out the same time "This is Us" was launched. The campaign implied that visitors could dominate the town as a local party haven, and the community became so incensed, Ringelberg said, the campaign was pulled. The school district superintendent even wrote a letter, she said, stating his disappointment that such an ad campaign would come out the same time the community was running an anti-drinking campaign in the schools.

Robertson and Ringelberg are expecting great success with "This is Us". They hope to expand it to tobacco use prevention among middle school students in the 2003-04 school year and to anti-drunk-driving campaigns.

"This has the potential to be expanded to a variety of issues," Robertson said.

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Resources:

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html

Decision Support System
www.preventiondss.org

Join Together
www.jointtogether.org

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
www.cadca.org

For this community success story and others from across the Southwest region, visit our website at <http://www.swcapt.org/products/success.html>

